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7 February 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR:

[redacted]
Chief, Honduras Working Group

FROM:

[redacted]

SUBJECT:

Response to Honduras Working Group Questions

REFERENCE:

Your memo of 31 January 1996

1. The following general qualification applies to my responses to each of the questions asked: my responses below are based on my memory of events between ten and thirteen years ago, which are documented in files in the possession of the Honduras Working Group to which I have not had access. Because memory is imperfect, selective, and subjective, my responses necessarily have the same defects. No representation to the contrary is being made; the only claim that I make regarding the accuracy of the below responses is that they reflect events as I now remember them. [redacted]

2. As requested, the following responses are keyed to the questions attached to your memo:

Section I, question A: Do you recall the late 1983 Olancho operation...? Yes. This refers to the first and largest of three armed incursions into Honduras from Nicaragua by Honduran nationals who had been trained for this purpose in Nicaragua and Cuba. These incursions were intended to establish the basis for an internal insurgency against the Honduran government (following the Cuban "foquismo" approach). These were distinct from the armed incursions into Honduras by Nicaraguan regular troops, of which there were also three principal episodes, but which began later and were directed against Nicaraguan Resistance support facilities in Honduran border areas. My recollection is that the guerrilla incursions were on a relatively short cycle (about 4-6 months apart) starting in mid-1983 (late 1983 was when the first

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one ended), and the regular Nicaraguan Army incursions were on an approximately annual cycle starting around Easter of 1984. ☐

The recruitment in Honduras of participants in the guerrilla incursions took place in 1980 and 1981, well before there was any organized anti-Sandinista activity in Honduras, and in some instances was conducted under false pretenses-- at least some potential recruits were told by their recruiters, who I recall were in some instances Communist Party of Honduras members and in others peasant and labor organizers, that they were being offered schooling in the Honduran capital to learn a trade, for example auto mechanics. Upon arrival in Tegucigalpa, they were told that the mechanics training course (or whatever) had been moved to Nicaragua, and when they arrived there, that it had been moved to Cuba, where they eventually found themselves in a military training course. This had two consequences: first, because of their origins in remote rural areas, poor communications, and the intentional arrangements made by the organizers, many of the recruits (of whom there were in total probably several hundred, many of whom for one reason or another never participated in the incursions) were unable to inform relatives of their changes in plans, and were eventually reported by relatives as "disappeared" after going to Tegucigalpa to attend a trade school. I do not recall the number of instances in which this happened, but recall that while it happened to a limited extent with the Reyes Mata group, it was more common among the subsequent groups (among whom "bait and switch" recruitment tactics were more common, presumably reflecting later recruitment after the supply of ideologically committed potential recruits was exhausted). ☐

The second consequence was that even in the initial (Reyes Mata) group, there were participants who had no intention of being there, and who defected to Honduran authorities virtually as soon as they set foot back in Honduras. In each of the instances of guerrilla incursion, the first notice of the incursion came from defectors from the group in question, rather than from armed activities of the group or other intelligence sources. While the Reyes Mata group was the largest (about 100) of the incursions and the only "purely" military one (in the sense of a uniformed armed group marching across the border in formation), reaction to it was the slowest of the three, because it was the first, it was kind of implausible and at first Honduran authorities did not take the defector accounts

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seriously, and because of the remoteness of their chosen operating area in western Olancho department, even the defectors had a hard time getting out. In fact, had there been no defectors, the group (had they succeeded in obtaining food) could have remained there for months before anybody noticed. Both because of the differences in ideological commitment between initial and later recruits and the sheer physical difficulty of defecting from their Olancho location, the defection rate for the Reyes Mata group was relatively low (I recall it being well below 10 percent), while those of the two subsequent groups were much higher-- very high, in the last group, perhaps on the order of 70 to 80 percent.

I recall considerable speculation as to why the Reyes Mata group chose the western Olancho area for their "foco," but no definitive explanation as to why they did so or what went wrong with their planning. In general, I recall that they in fact were aware that they were entering a depopulated area where there were no food supplies, but expected food deliveries either by internal supporters in Honduras or the Sandinista Air Force which either failed to happen or they never found. In any event, the subsequent two groups were considerably less adventurous, and the second one (numbering about 50 people) infiltrated across the border individually and in small groups, dressed in civilian clothes (but carrying military paraphernalia in their packs) in more populated areas generally in El Paraiso Department, while the participants in the third incursion (about 30 people) crossed the border as legal travelers in El Paraiso and Choluteca departments, headed for rally points in Tegucigalpa where they were to pick up their military equipment.

Regarding Reyes Mata's death, I am now aware of subsequent reporting that he was captured and executed by members of the Honduran armed forces, but do not recall any contemporaneous reports to that effect. I no longer recall the specifics of contemporaneous reporting, but in general, my recollection of the situation is that before any encounters with Honduran authorities, the members of the insurgent group broke up into smaller parties seeking to reach more populated areas where they could find food. They were described as being in a very weakened condition, and for the most part surrendering at the first opportunity. I do recall, however, descriptions of relatively minor instances of combat in which the more ideologically

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committed members of the group did offer resistance, and in which some were killed. I do not recall any specific descriptions of Reyes Mata's death, but do recall that he was included among those who resisted and were killed. []

Regarding Father James Carney AKA Padre Guadalupe, my recollection is that his presence with the group was reported from the outset. He was not, however, "an American priest." He was either a Honduran or Nicaraguan citizen, and had, I believe, formally renounced his American citizenship. I am also not certain he was still a priest. He was, I believe, in his late 50's, by far the oldest of the group (I recall Reyes Mata to have been in his late 40's, and virtually all the others in their late teens and 20's) and I recall that for this reason I considered plausible the reports that after the guerrilla group split up in search of food, he had become too weak to proceed, and had been left in his hammock on the bank of the Patuca river by the others traveling with him, where he presumably died of starvation. I am not aware that his remains were ever found. I believe other starvation deaths were reported in the Reyes Mata group, and am aware of subsequent verified instances of death by starvation among Nicaraguan Resistance members in a similar area on the Nicaraguan side of the border, and have never had any reason to doubt this account of Padre Guadalupe's death. []

Section I, Question B: ...Honduran Special Forces soldier of officer named Vasquez...? I have no recollection of a Honduran soldier or officer by that name. []

Section I, Question C: [] tasking/response on Carney? I have no recollection of specific special tasking regarding Carney. All that we knew of him was reported as it was obtained, and any special tasking would have told us to continue doing what we were already doing, and would thus not have been of particular note. The importance of the subject was self-evident. []

Section I, Question D: What [] ask/what did they say? I have no specific recollection []

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[redacted] The Honduran military response to the Olancho incursion was a large-scale overt military operation, and thus came under the purview of [redacted] reporting [redacted] officers, [redacted] visited the scene and the Honduran military units which were participating, and their reporting concentrated on the Honduran response. The [redacted] concentration, as I recall the situation, was on the nature of the threat. [redacted]

Section I, Question E: Embassy role in investigation of Carney disappearance...? I do not recall a formal investigation of Carney's fate (which, despite the lack of remains, I do not consider a "disappearance," because there was a plausible and official Honduran account of his fate), [redacted]

[redacted] From my knowledge of the situation at the time, there did not appear to be anything to investigate-- while the importance of Carney's participation in the incursion and reported death was self-evident (as was that of the incursion itself), so was the plausibility of the reported outcome. Since, as noted previously, we reported everything we knew about Carney when we knew it, it is possible that I have forgotten the existence of an "investigation" because it was unexceptional-- there was nothing new to report or to investigate. I subsequently (1995) became aware of the 1988 Inspector General investigation from press reports, but do not recall contemporaneous knowledge of that investigation into Carney's fate either-- perhaps for the same reasons. [redacted]

Section I, Question F: U.S. Military operations in Olancho; [redacted] presence/activities Aguacate? I do not recall whether there was a U.S. military role in supporting Honduran operations in Olancho or not. There often was a U.S. military role in Honduran operations requiring troop mobility, but I do not recall whether that was the case in this instance or not. As noted previously, [redacted] personnel visited the scene of Honduran operations in Olancho and were the primary reporters on the Honduran effort. [redacted]

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Aguacate had previously been abandoned by the Honduran Army, but when it was reoccupied its formal status was that of Honduran army base, and the official custodians were personnel of the Honduran Army's 16th Battalion, which stationed a platoon under the command of a lieutenant there. The lieutenant was the base commander; neither Honduran nor U.S. military personnel engaged in joint operations with their Honduran counterparts would have felt that they needed CIA permission to conduct operations from Aguacate. [redacted]

Section II, Question A: [redacted] role and coordination of State Department Human Rights Reports? The Embassy submission for the State Department human rights report was prepared by the Embassy political section, which had a designated Human Rights officer, based on information available to the Embassy. Since the report was unclassified, it could draw on [redacted] reporting (which was available to the Embassy) only in very general ways. Coordination was through [redacted]

[redacted] I did not participate in and am not aware of the Washington-level process or coordination of the reports ultimately published by the Department of State. [redacted]

Section II, Question B: Human rights report lead, [redacted] information/any disagreements? See reply to question II-A. I recall no disagreements with the Embassy on issues related to human rights reporting. [redacted]

Section II, Question C: Classification issues? See above replies. I recall no instances of classification or sensitivity being an issue with regard to human rights reporting. [redacted]

Section II, Question D: Read draft? Fair? Reason to believe/personal knowledge of pressures? I probably read at

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least portions of the draft reports prepared during my time in Honduras, but do not recall the content, so I could not state without reviewing them whether I considered them fair or not. I recall no personal knowledge of or reason to believe that there were pressures applied to the Ambassador or the Embassy regarding human rights reporting during my tenure [redacted] (S)

Section III, Question A: [redacted] Not applicable; not assigned in 1989. (S)

Section III, Question B: [redacted] Not applicable; not assigned in 1988. (S)

Section III, Question C: [redacted] I did not have knowledge in 1984 that [redacted] had committed human rights abuses and do not have such knowledge now. While I am aware from the press that allegations have recently been made against [redacted]

[redacted] I regard them as simply another instance of politically-motivated harassment [redacted]

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Section IV, Question A: Congressional inquiries/unreported information? I can recall no instances of unreported information or Congressional inquiries which were not answered. []

Section IV, Question B: Politicized reporting or analysis? I can recall no instances of politicized reporting or analysis on Honduras. []

Section V, Question A: []

Section V, Question B: Human rights concerns regarding Honduran units? The Honduran uniformed police (FUSEP) was overtly reported to be involved in both politically-motivated and criminally-motivated (or in some cases anti-criminally motivated) activity which was considered to be in violation of basic human rights. There was intelligence reporting to the same effect. It was also generally disreputable and corrupt. []

FUSEP no longer existed [] The Special Unit of the 316th Military Intelligence Battalion was created for the explicit purpose of []

[] a unit under more rigorous and effective military command and control. To the best of my knowledge and recollection, this resolved the problem-- I cannot remember any verified instance of 316th involvement in human rights violations. []

Section V, Question C: Resolution of allegations? While I do not recall any specific instances, in general, an effort was made to determine the verisimilitude of allegations that were

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specific enough to check. I do not recall any that were consistent with any known facts. [redacted]

Section V, Question D: Know of any unreported incidents? I do not recall any incidents of abuses or human rights violations about which we acquired original information that was not reported for any reason. [redacted]

Section V, Question E: What do you know about ELACH? I recall one (of what I have since been told by Honduras Working Group personnel were several) intelligence reports about ELACH which provided information about historical [redacted] but not contemporaneous, instances of human rights violations. I cannot recall any Honduran intelligence or security personnel who may have belonged to or had contact with ELACH. [redacted]

[redacted]

cc: LA/LGL
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(7 February 1996)

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